Germany in Stalin's Crosshairs

BERND SCHWIPPER

GERMANY IN STALIN'S CROSSHAIRS

The Red Army's Entry into the Second World War, and the Wehrmacht's Actions in 1941

A Comparative Study
Based on Russian Documents

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Translators' Preface

We are proud to present this translation of General Bernd Schwipper's seminal study on *Operation Barbarossa*, the greatest military operation ever undertaken. Originally published in 2016, *Deutschland im Visier Stalins* has long remained virtually outside the frame of reference of historians unable to read German.

This is truly unfortunate, since all they had to rely on for correcting the accepted narrative on the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 was the work by Viktor Suvorov, beginning with *Icebreaker*, first published in 1989, with the English translation appearing in 1990. In this and several other works Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun—Suvorov's real name—argued that Stalin was planning to attack Germany, but that Hitler beat him to it in the nick of time. Since Suvorov had convincing arguments but at best circumstantial evidence for his stance, most leading historians in the West, those whose voice counted most in establishing "historical correctness," rather haughtily dismissed his books.

There was, however, the occasional courageous historian who ventured out and took up Suvorov. One of these was Dutch historian Marius Broekmeyer, who in 2006 published *Bedrogen bedriegers. Stalin Contra Hitler* (Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt), arguing that Stalin was indeed planning to invade Germany, although not immediately. Broekmeyer identifies Gabriel Gorodetsky as the most vociferous proponent of the theory that the USSR had no plans to attack in 1941 (or afterward). But according to Broekmeyer, Gorodetsky and other mainstream historians conspicuously avoid addressing their opponents' arguments: "They shout that it is a shame; they are in denial, but I have not yet seen them refute the arguments of Danilov, Hoffmann, Doroshenko, Magenheimer, Bobylev, Maser, Meltyukhov, Dashichev, Suvorov, Topitsch, Nevezhin, Vladimir Sokolov and Post" (p. 229). While each of those historians has added facts and arguments to those first put forward by Suvorov,[1] none of them has produced the kind of solid, extensively documented and rigorous study that General Schwipper has written.

What we have been seeing in the debate on Operation Barbarossa is symptomatic for the way in which the Western academic historic environment functions.

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[1] Valeri Danilov, "Hat der Generalsstab der Roten Armee einen Präventivschlag gegen Deutschland vorbereitet?" *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 1993:1, 41–51; Joachim Hoffmann, "Die Angriffsvorbereitungen der Sowjetunion 1941," *Zwei Wege nach Moskau. Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt bis zum "Unternehmen Barbarossa,"* Munich and Zurich, 1991; Heinz Magenheimer, *Der deutsche Angriff auf Sowjetrussland 1941. Das operative Problem in Planung und Ablauf des Feldzuges*. Dissertation, Vienna

Apart from "historical correctness" in the West, another reason for the almost universal dismissal of Suvorov's thesis is the fact that most Russian historians also refused to support Suvorov. This "scholarly consensus" has helped to preserve much of the accepted narrative on the Second World War. American revisionist historian Harry Elmer Barnes has called this mechanism of collective reaction by the historical establishment, the blackballing of anyone who steps out of line, the "historical blackout."[2] It happened to Barnes himself, after in 1926 he had published an alternative vision of the origins of World War One.[3] Subsequently, Barnes distanced himself even further, as he began to write about contemporary politics from a non-interventionist, pacifist angle, further angering the academic establishment.

Against this intellectual and political background, the publication of an English translation of General Schwipper's work is crucially important. Mainstream historians, especially those entrenched in the ivory towers of prestigious academies, colleges and universities will no longer be able to maintain that Hitler committed an unforced error by ordering Operation Barbarossa on a whim.

General Schwipper proves unequivocally that Stalin was indeed planning to invade Germany and Western Europe, and that in 1940 he initiated comprehensive military and industrial preparations on a vast scale. In the first place because the author has seen all the relevant available Soviet government and military staff documents, both published and unpublished. It should be underlined that, unlike the leading Western historians, the author is thoroughly familiar with the Russian language. Secondly, because unlike any historian in the West, General Schwipper holds a doctorate in military science and has been a career officer. He received his own general staff training in Moscow. Thus, sheer knowledge and vast experience have made him uniquely qualified to research the circumstances under which Operation Barbarossa was launched. And armed with these qualifications, Schwipper spent 15 years on researching and writing this book. It is a milestone of World War Two historical research, because, at least in the West, it will make it inevitable to rewrite entire sections of the standard narrative.

While Schwipper makes the most of his collected documents by deftly and thoroughly dissecting them, there naturally remain some questions that cannot

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University, 1969; Pavel Bobylev, "Tochku v diskussii stavit rano. K voprosu o planirovanii v General'nyi shtab RKKA v 1941g.?" *Otechestvennaya istoriya* 2000:1, 41–64; Werner Maser, *Der Wortbruch. Hitler, Stalin und der Zweite Weltkrieg.* Munich, 1994; Mikhail Meltyukhov, *Upuschennyi Shans Stalina. Sovetsky Soyuz y borba za Evropu.* Moscow, 2000; Vyacheslav Dashichev, "Pakt Gitlera-Stalina. Mify y realnost," *Istoriki otvechayut na voprosy*, Moscow, 1990, 262–273; Ernst Topitsch, "'Barbarossa' – ein Präventivkrieg?" *Geschichte und Gegenwart* 1989:8, 1–15; Vladimir Nevezhin, "The Pact with Germany and the Idea of an 'Offensive War' (1939-1941)," *Journal of Soviet Military Affairs*, December 1995, 809–844; Vladimir Sokolov, "Did Stalin Intend to Attack Hitler?" *Journal of Soviet/Slavic Military Studies*, 1998, 113–141; and Walter Post, *Unternehmen Barbarossa. Deutsche und Sowjetische Angriffspläne 1940/41*, Hamburg 1995.

[2] Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Struggle Against the Historical Blackout*, 9th edition, 1952.

[3] Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War. An Introduction to the Problem of War Guilt*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

be answered based on this evidence; and he is careful to point these out. Some rather perplexing questions pertain to the enemy assessments which the Red Army General Staff prepared when drafting its war plans against Germany. The first enigma concerns the inaccuracy of these assessments. On the one hand, "Soviet Military Intelligence generally functioned excellently," but on the other, the estimates of the deployed Wehrmacht forces were always hugely exaggerated, by thousands of tanks and dozens of divisions. Yet, the General Staff correctly recognized that the Wehrmacht was able to preempt the Red Army's attack. This brings us to the second enigma: the recognized danger was never dealt with—the General Staff never planned and prepared an effective defense. How can such blunders be reconciled with the General Staff's evident professionalism?

We propose that the key to this question may be Stalin himself. As is also evident from Schwipper's narrative, Stalin decided personally on all matters of strategy. He was firmly convinced that Hitler would never open a second front against the USSR, and on this point he brooked no dissent. The Red Army leadership, on the other hand, was growing increasingly worried. But how to convince Stalin? If the real numbers about German strength could not persuade him of the danger, perhaps an inflated estimate might do the trick?

But to the last, Stalin refused to heed their forebodings. On the very day before they came true, he reacted with anger to the news of the Wehrmacht's impending attack: "This information is an English provocation. Find the author of this provocation and punish him." Stalin's stubborn insistence likely prevented the General Staff from making the defensive preparations that its own enemy assessments demanded. In a nutshell, therefore, the apparent strangeness of these assessments may be understood as a failed attempt by the General Staff to manage Stalin. The reader may judge whether or not our proposal fits Schwipper's own facts and analysis.

In preparing this translation, we have striven to adapt the formal structure of the text to the expectations of North American readers, and also to make the rather large text easier to navigate. Section headings were given a hierarchical structure, and some lower-level section headings were added. Occasionally, a paragraph was moved up or down within the chapter in question to better fit into the flow of the narrative. Captions were added to all tables and figures; and, with some of the tables, parts of the tabulated information were moved to footnotes so as to make the table itself more concise and readable.

In the German text, tables and figures had been numbered jointly, and this combined series also included some, but not all of the longer literature quotes. In this translation, figures and tables have been numbered separately, so that their numbers do not correspond to those in the German original. Literature quotes remain unnumbered throughout. Some information concerning Hitler's purported

letter to Stalin of June 14th, 1941, and on the troops deployed by both sides were moved from footnotes to the appendix; and in a few cases, literal quotes and numbers that were repeated verbatim were abridged or replaced with appropriate cross-references. All literature references from the major documentary sources (published by Abaturov, Adamushko, the German Historical Institute in Moscow, Hubatsch, Naumov and Yakovlev, Warlimont and Zakharov) have been checked, and in some cases corrected. The English translations of literal quotes taken from these sources were likewise verified, whereas those taken from other sources rely on Schwipper's German text alone.

A word about place names is in order. Large parts of the area in which the events detailed in this book took place changed hands, sometimes repeatedly, due to those events, and they changed names accordingly. Here, we used the place names that were in use *before* World War II. For example, the cities now known as Gdansk and Kaliningrad are called by their historic German names of Danzig and Königsberg. Ukrainian cities are called by their Russian names, e.g. Lvov, not Lviv. The current names have been added to the index, however, e.g. "Danzig (now Gdansk)" or "Lvov (Lviv)." Furthermore, we have added several translators' notes to the text. These appear as follows: "[TN: text of the explanation.]" In contrast, notes that are prefixed with "AN" were added by the author (Bernd Schwipper) and are translated from the original German text.

In spite of the above formal changes, we did our best to preserve all of the original text's information, as well as the nuances of the author's interpretations. We are very grateful to General Schwipper for entrusting us with this translation, as well as for patiently and thoroughly answering the many questions we asked him during its preparation.

We wish to express our thankful appreciation to the people of Antelope Hill, and to the editor, Lute Currie, for their help in realizing this translation, which we see as a long overdue and sorely needed correction of the standard interpretation of a historical period that continues to shape our everyday lives almost a century after the fact.

Michael Palmer
Hans Vogel

Foreword

As the saying goes, he who tells the truth needs a swift horse—for the truth is rarely popular. Many find it hard to stomach, and so they resist it. Moreover, the truth cannot be expected to assert itself unassisted and in due course. The world has known many truths that nobody remembers today. At some point they were no longer spoken, either because they had simply been forgotten or because no one had the courage to uphold them.

It is necessary to state these truisms, since today's society is utterly oblivious of them. With respect to the history of World War II, such lack of awareness has led to the mistaken belief that the truth about this era is firmly established, and moreover that we can rely on a comprehensive system of academic scholarship to safeguard and disseminate the truth. The officially sanctioned version of "our history" is widely believed and—particularly in Germany—constitutes an essential foundation of popular identity and political thought.

Only in this light can it be understood that the true causes of the Russian campaign of 1941 have been obscured for so long by the myth of an unprovoked attack by Germany on an allegedly unprepared Soviet Russia. The average citizen, when asked about the reasons for the German attack, will most likely blame a German dictator and his plans of territorial conquest and settlement (*"Lebensraum"*), and he will talk about masses of German tanks rolling across the vast Russian plains without meeting any opposition. Asked about the exact numbers of tanks, he will assume German superiority—never imagining that on the very day the war began, the ratio was nearly seven to one in favor of the Soviet Union.

Academic historiography, too, commonly ignores this and other telling numbers. Similar ignorance envelops the political events leading up to Operation Barbarossa. An example will illustrate the extent of this calamity. Some time ago, Rolf-Dieter Müller, who was for many years affiliated with Germany's Military History Research Office (*Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*) and holder of a professorial title, published a book titled *The Enemy Is in the East*. While Müller's book does not contain any substantial evidence, it does encapsulate the whole wretchedness of mainstream historiography in this remark:[1]

> Reich Foreign Secretary Constantin Freiherr von Neurath assured the American Ambassador William C. Bullitt on May 18th, 1936, that Hitler viewed the enmity

[1] Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten. Hitlers geheime Pläne für einen Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion im Jahr 1939* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011).

> between Germany and the USSR as insurmountable and that he would only keep the peace until the fortifications along the western border were completed.

According to Müller, the German foreign minister thus naïvely revealed to a US chief diplomat the premeditated German attack on the USSR. This is, of course, completely wrong. If one looks up the actual Neurath quote, one finds that he ascribed the insurmountable enmity to the USSR's attitude. Neurath attributed Moscow's attitude to its view that Germany was the main obstacle to a communist conquest of Europe.[2] As pointed out before by the author of this foreword,[3] Neurath was right. The present book by Bernd Schwipper offers ample further evidence for this thesis. Müller's case is not merely an isolated error, but rather it illustrates the sometimes complete estrangement of academic historiography from actual history. No historian worth his salt would commit to paper such a completely incongruous sentence, which makes the German foreign minister a traitor to his country and turns the thinking of the German dictator entirely on its head.

Hitler explained his ideas on this point only a few weeks after the conversation between Neurath and Bullitt. In the well-known 1936 memorandum on the four-year plan—the *"Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan"*—he concluded that Germany's armed forces would have to be ready for war within four years. This statement is, of course, frequently quoted—particularly also in schoolbooks and pamphlets used for political education—because it asks for military preparedness at a time close to the fall of 1939, which ties in with the narrative of a premeditated German attack. Virtually never, however, and certainly not in German political education, does anyone cite the German dictator's justification for this demand. For what kind of war, then, did Hitler request the German Wehrmacht to be ready within four years from 1936? It should be ready for the defense against a Soviet attack. In preparation for this attack, Hitler said, Soviet communism was already harnessing all the reserves of the country it controlled, the world's largest.

In this book, Schwipper gives us a great deal of new information about the ever-increasing Soviet war preparations. Especially the operational plans of the Red Army in the years 1940 and 1941, the evolving armaments programs and the constant expansion of the Soviet armed forces, as well as their standing orders in early summer 1941, are presented in a manner that is in some respects completely new. To this end, Schwipper draws on his own original, groundbreaking study of Soviet sources, and he takes into account the Russian-language research literature that is otherwise unknown in Germany.

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[2] International Military Tribunal, *War Criminals*, vol. 37, document 150-L, 588–592. [3] Stefan Scheil, *Die Eskalation des Zweiten Weltkriegs von 1940 bis zum Unternehmen Barbarossa 1941* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2011); and *Präventivkrieg Barbarossa. Fragen, Fakten, Antworten* (Steigra: Antaios, 2011).

The result is clear: the Red Army intended and was expected to attack Germany in early July 1941. Its armaments, deployment, operational planning, and orders already given all aimed at this one goal—and at nothing else.

At this point it is worth remembering that the state of official and officious research on the Soviet attack plans did not always look as grim as it does today, even in Germany. The 1990s saw some progress on this issue after the dissolution of the socialist bloc. In the year 2000, Professor Bernd Bonwetsch, at the time director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow, summed up the state of knowledge on Soviet military preparations by saying that the order for the Red Army to attack could have been given "from July 10th, 1941—if Stalin really wanted to give it or would have given it and if Hitler had not preempted him with his own order to attack."[4]

Bonwetsch could not bring himself to repudiate the conventional view that Germany had been the aggressor. Yet he offered a partly accurate account of the Soviet starting position—one that soon slipped into obscurity. Another author who also determined that a Soviet attack had been planned for early July 1941 should not be forgotten here, for he caused quite a stir and a breath of fresh air when publishing his writings in the late 1980s. Under the pseudonym Viktor Suvorov, the former Soviet agent Vladimir Rezun also let Russian sources speak, without, however, revealing them completely.[5]

In this book, Bernd Schwipper goes beyond Suvorov to present a comprehensive analysis, carefully considered and documented throughout. The question of whether the German attack on the USSR in 1941 was a "preventive war" is once again answered in the affirmative. This conclusion is justified using Russian sources. One can only wish the book good fortune and much resonance. Should this come to pass, the consequence might be that, instead of those who love the truth, a different group of participants in contemporary German historical research might find themselves in need of some fast horses.

Stefan Scheil
August 2015

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[4] Bernd Bonwetsch, "Die Forschungskontroverse um die Kriegsvorbereitungen der Roten Armee," in Bianka Pietrow-Ennker and Lev Besymenski, eds., *Präventivkrieg? Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 170–189. [5] Viktor Suvorov, *Der Eisbrecher. Hitler in Stalins Kalkül* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996) and *Der Tag M* (Stuttgart: Klett- Cotta, 1995).

Preface

The sole purpose of this study is to search for and uncover the historical truth. Objectivity requires that the historical picture be based not on wishful thinking, but rather on objective, incontrovertible historical facts. Only by following the evidence can we arrive at a faithful picture of the real military-political events.

In historiography, as in other fields, it seems that nowadays the "truth" is subject to the power and the political calculations of the ruling parties. It remains true that history is written by the victors.

Contemporary historiography operates with astonishing ignorance, which is undoubtedly rooted in ideology. It imposes dogmatic views and systematically discounts historical facts that do not fit its preconceived ideas, even if the facts are clearly described in the documentary sources. Elaborate arguments are assembled to support the authors' own preconceived, firmly held political convictions; one-sided interpretations are applied, and the historical picture is distorted.

The terms "Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union" and "Hitler's racist and ideological war of annihilation" have accompanied us since our childhood and are even today treated as articles of faith in the history books. Nevertheless, they are untenable in their current form and interpretation, since they fail entirely to take into account the dynamics and the development of the historical situation of the time. They are purely ideological concepts.

The present study is based on the evaluation of a great number of Russian documents, which allowed for a sufficient depth of focus in analyzing the historical processes that led up to the German–Soviet war. Since all the central statements of this study are based on these Russian documents, all skeptics and critics are advised to first familiarize themselves thoroughly with those sources.

I should point out at the very beginning that it was not possible to conclusively answer all open questions pertaining to the period preceding the German–Soviet war. For that, it would be necessary that the archives be opened up completely, and that full access be given to all documents of the USSR's political and military leadership, as well as to the planning documents of the military districts, fronts, armies, and corps. I therefore do not lay claim to some sort of absolute truth, which I know to be unachievable. But I feel compelled to seek the truth and to approach it as closely as possible, notwithstanding the current restrictions on access to the documents from the Russian archives and other materials.

The chances that the results of the present work—or the findings of several other like-minded historians—will meaningfully change the historical understanding of the majority of German people appear remote. Nevertheless, in the interest of historical truth, the attempt must be made.

Last but not least, I wish to thank many friends for their help in obtaining the necessary literature, and my wife, Christel for her years of patience during my work on this study, without which this book would never have been written.

Dr. rer. mil. Bernd Schwipper
May 18th, 2015

Introduction

This study is an investigation of the period from 1939 to 1941 that preceded the outbreak of the German–Soviet war.

It is limited in scope. Even though the need for an all-encompassing reassessment of this historical period is recognized in principle, such was not the aim of the current study. The political, economic, diplomatic, and military aspects of this period are numerous and very complex, and no attempt has been made here to integrate them all into a comprehensive account of the prehistory of the German–Soviet war.

Critics might point to the extraordinarily complex situation that prevailed in the immediate prewar period, and on this premise might try to disqualify this study as one-sided and too simplistic. To forestall such criticism, I want to emphasize at the outset the restricted objective of this study, which focuses primarily on analyzing the historical facts of military policy. Other spheres of Soviet policy—the development of international relations and antagonisms, the development of the economy, international economic and trade relations, the changing slogans of ideological and political propaganda, the political leadership by the Communist Party, the influence of the Communist International (Comintern), diplomacy, etc.—are only touched upon as necessary. I consider these political and economic subjects to have already been covered sufficiently by other authors.

The Sources

The sources used for this study chiefly comprise more than 2,400 published Russian documents, more than 650 reconnaissance reports, as well as 467 reports by the Red Army on the state of its readiness for mobilization.

Many of the documents used in this study were found in the Archives of the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Military Archives, the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation, the Archives of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (1998 edition), and the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk, 2007). Other important sources were documents of the Ministries of Defense of the Russian Federation and of the Republic of Belarus (Moscow, 2006).

These publications are usually copies of the original documents, the release of which took place mainly under President Yeltsin. However, documents or parts of

documents of an explosive or compromising nature were not published. Maps and appendices to all documents are missing, and documents from the so-called "Red Packages"[1] are not accessible. In the era of President Putin, restrictions were again imposed on the access to the archived documents. Fortunately, a large number of German documents were digitized and published on the Internet in May 2015, some of which could still be incorporated into this study.[2] Also included among the sources was a large number of technical and other nonfiction books from the Soviet and post-Soviet era, both critical and apologetic contemporary Russian literature, and related articles published in various Russian military history journals and magazines, as well as descriptions of the historical processes.

The approximately 40 memoirs published by Soviet generals and officers, some of which are available to the author in the original, could only be used for a few quotations and facts. Notably, the figures contained in these memoirs often deviate substantially from those given in the archival documents. It needs to be kept in mind that, in describing the historical context, the writers of these memoirs were compelled to adhere to the binding guidelines that had been drawn up by historical-scientific institutes pursuant to Stalin's requests. Also, many of these memoirs completely omit any discussion of the prewar period of the German–Soviet war.

The comparative examination of the Wehrmacht's actions was based on General Franz Halder's records, the war diaries of the High Commands of the Wehrmacht (OKW), of the Army (OKH), and of the Navy; the reports of the OKW including the special reports ("Sonderberichte"), as well as the documents of the OKW, the OKH, and of Army Group B/Center, which were digitized by the German Historical Institute in Moscow. Also used were the statements of the German generals before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, and a number of press publications of the time that are still accessible.

Several important facts and figures could be taken from the works of Müller-Hillebrand, Philippi/Heim, Hubatsch, and Tippelskirch, as well as the memoirs of Warlimont, Kesselring, Guderian, and others. The review of a large number of chronicles and histories of the army units that were transferred to the East in the prewar period also provided valuable insights.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that neither the Russian nor the German sources can be regarded as pristine and unadulterated. The historiography imposed by the occupying powers has left its imprints in the German sources. This also applies to Halder's war diary. Since 1946, Halder worked for the US Army's Department of History as head of a research group that included up to 150 German officers.

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[1] The "Red Packages" were sealed envelopes issued to the Red Army's fronts, armies, corps, and divisions. They contained the battle instructions for these units and were to be opened only on explicit orders from the Red Army leadership. [2] German Historical Institute Moscow, Digitized Documents of the Wehrmacht, available at `https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org/de/`.

This group was tasked with the compilation of studies on military science. Even Halder's booklet *Hitler als Feldherr* [Hitler as Commander], published in 1949, is marked with the entry "Military Government Information Control License US-E 273," confirming that it had been examined and approved by the US military control authorities.

The war diaries of the Naval War Command[3] are marked throughout with the registration by the British Admiralty (for example, vol. 10 is marked with "Case GE 110 PG 32030"). Therefore they contain only material that suited the victors. Even the first Bavarian school atlas printed after the war, a slim volume of 33 pages published in 1948, bears the entry "Approved for use in schools by the Office of Military Government (US), Education and Cultural Relations Division on 16.4.1947 GE-IA 350.01 (Germany)."

To avoid drawing unwarranted historical perspectives and conclusions from such sources, the author considered it appropriate to base his analysis primarily on undisputed figures and historically proven facts, to look for logical connections between those facts, to infer the truth by comparing the statements of the various sources, and, when working with all of the above sources, to read between the lines so as to detect the hidden subtext.

A notable exception to the above caveats are the digitized documents of the Wehrmacht, the Army High Command, and Army Group B/Center, released by the German Historical Institute Moscow in April 2015. Their authenticity is beyond doubt, though the selection is limited—especially for Army Group B/Center, where most published items are trivial reports on documents lost or found.

Overall, documents vital to this study and the short prewar period are exceedingly scarce. An absolute truth cannot be offered—indeed, the author considers it unattainable in principle. However, the aim of this study is to approach this truth as closely as possible by using a wealth of relative truths. The reader may judge whether this aim has been achieved.

The Method

The author did not merely compile numbers and quotations but followed a strict analytical method grounded in dialectical principles.

This analysis of the military-political situation in the period preceding the German–Soviet war did not aim for a comprehensive treatment of all areas. Instead, those spheres of activity were identified that are decisive for answering this central question: Who preempted whom or who intended to preempt whom? The methodology and the fields of activity that were included are illustrated in figure 1.

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[3]Werner Rahn, Gerhard Schreiber, et al., eds. *Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung*. 68 vols. (E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1988–1997).

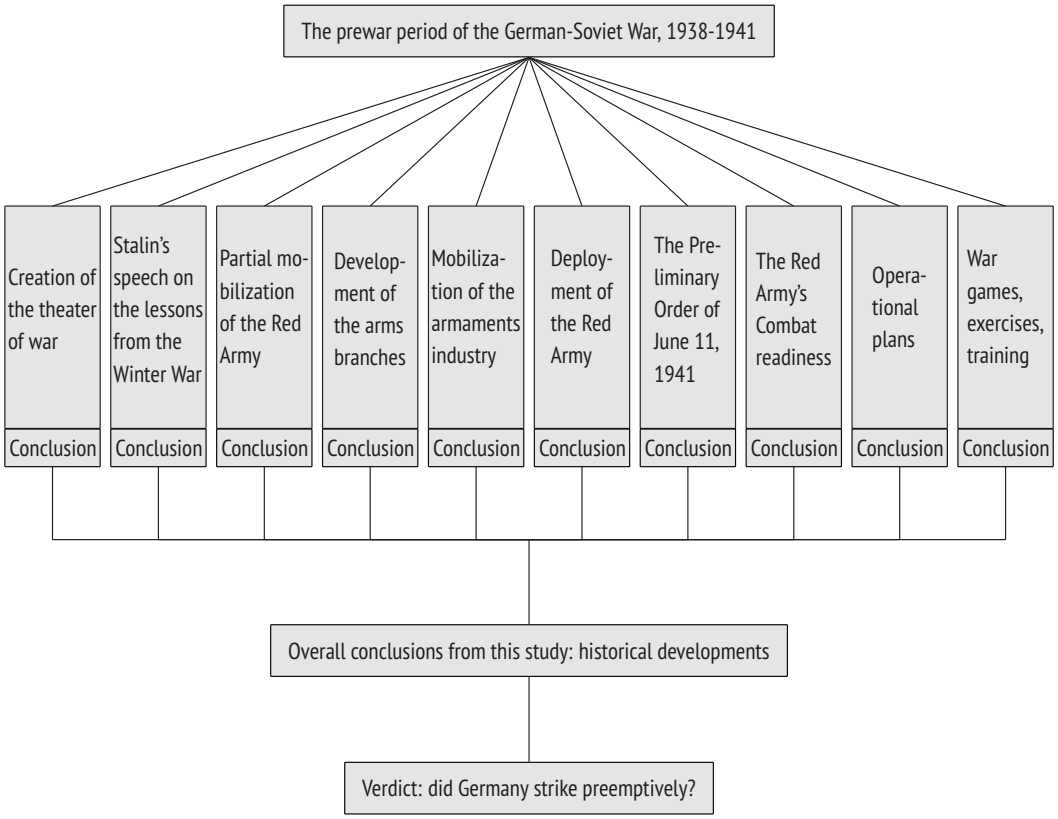

Figure 1. Schematic of the analytical method applied in this study. See text for further explanations.

Each chapter addresses one of these fields, generally following a chronological order, and concludes with findings. Only Chapter 9, on the operational plans of the Red Army's General Staff, diverges by analyzing the components of the successive plans in direct comparison. This approach was chosen to highlight trends, differences, and contradictions, and to derive clear conclusions. The book's figures, facts, and quotations are not intended to stand alone but to illustrate and support the argument, contributing to a broader and deeper understanding. To make the chapters intelligible on their own while also clarifying their connection to the larger picture, some facts and statements are repeated across chapters. For simplicity, and because the operational plans are mentioned repeatedly, they are cited only by their date of issue rather than their full titles.

This work is a study, not a storybook. To preserve readability and context, graphics, tables, and even long quotations are included in the main text rather than in appendices. With the same aim, the author has kept the use of abbreviations in the text to a minimum, though their use was unavoidable in tables. In order to provide a realistic, objective picture of the unfolding processes, the Red Army's preparations for attack are examined in their changing and manifold detail.

Translations

Translations from Russian were carried out by the author. In order to ensure that the Russian documents, which are reproduced in excerpts, can be accurately understood and appreciated, the translations are largely literal, even if this sometimes required stylistic compromises in the German version.

Some translations (e.g., those of the operational plans or of directives and orders) retain the characteristic language that may sound strange to the uninitiated, but is common in military parlance. If, for example, the translation of an operational plan reads "to have," "to add," or "to destroy," then, in military usage, this must always be prefixed with a phrase like "I propose . . .," "I order . . ." etc., in order to obtain the complete meaning of the order or memorandum in question.

Russian transcriptions were done according to the Russian-German dictionary by Daum and Schenk.[4]

Numerical Data

Due to the multitude of contradictory figures published in the literature on the Red Army, almost without exception, all figures on the Red Army were taken from Russian documents. This pertains to figures contained both in the tables (which were compiled by the author) and in the running text. Likewise, for the Wehrmacht, only those figures were used that were found in the cited sources.

Figures concerning, for example, the number of divisions of the Red Army that were found in memoirs and various other historical writings were not used, since usually such works do not specify the points in time to which these numbers pertain. Such works usually also fail to discuss the stage of troop movement and development within the context of the USSR's war preparations and of the Red Army's deployment.

[4] This applies to the German text only; the transcriptions in this English translation correspond to common English usage.

1. The Strategic Concentration Area and the Theater of War

A theater of war is defined as the territory—in its widest sense, including land, air, and sea—where armed forces carry out their strategic tasks during war.[1]

The characteristics of the theater of war are of decisive importance for warfare. Geographical features may favor or hinder offensive or defensive operations. Alternatively, they may afford opportunities for securing the flanks. The availability of resources to supply the armed forces, the condition of the infrastructure (including railroads, roads, bridges, waterways, airfields, and communications), the economic structure, population density, climate and weather conditions, all of these will affect the planning and the conduct of the war.

1.1. The Creation of the Theater of War

Taking advantage of the German–Polish war and the ensuing wider European war, the USSR initiated military actions in its Western war theater. The documents of the Red Army General Staff and the memoirs of contemporaries usually refer to these military actions as "campaigns." They were undertaken in spite of existing non-aggression treaties and began on September 17th, 1939. As shown in table 1.1, these Soviet campaigns were planned or carried out in all directions and virtually without interruption. Let us look somewhat more closely at these campaigns, but without going into detail concerning the political, economic, and diplomatic events that preceded them.

1.1.1. The Polish Campaign of the USSR (September 1939). On September 6th, 1939, the Soviet leadership ordered a partial mobilization, which means that the entry into Poland was decided on this day at the latest. At this early date, the Wehrmacht certainly could not possibly have posed a threat to the ethnic Belorussian or Ukrainian population in eastern Poland. Yet the Soviet leadership used this contrived threat as a pretext to justify its own Polish campaign. The covert partial mobilization was begun on September 7th, 1939, under cover of "Great Maneuvers."[*1]

[1] *Deutsches Militärlexikon* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1962), 232.

[*1] See *Mobilization for the Polish Campaign* on page 87.

Table 1.1. Soviet campaigns initiated or planned after the German invasion of Poland. which began on September 1st, 1939.

Date / Time Period	Campaign / Territories Occupied
September 17th, 1939	"Polish Campaign," occupation of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine
November 30th, 1939 to March 13th, 1940	First Soviet-Finnish war ("Winter War"), occupation of parts of Finland
April 1940	Transfer of significant troop contingents to the Kiev and the Odessa Military Districts in preparation for the Bessarabian campaign, as well as to the Crimea/Caucasus region for defending the oil fields around Baku/Batumi against British and French bombing
June 17th, 1940	"Baltic campaign," military occupation of the Baltic states Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia
June 28th, 1940	"Bessarabian campaign," occupation of Bessarabia [a] and Bukovina [b]
July to early September 1940	Concentration of strong forces in the Leningrad, Baltic Special and Western Special Military Districts for a planned "East Prussian Campaign"
Late 1940 or early 1941	Second planned Soviet-Finnish war ("Continuation War")

[a] A historical region largely congruent with the modern-day state of Moldova [TN].
[b] A small historical region at the border between Romania and Ukraine, to the west of Bessarabia [TN].

On September 9th, 1939, the People's Commissar for Defense of the USSR, Marshal Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, and the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, Komandarm (General) Boris Mikhailovich Shaposhnikov, issued orders to the Belorussian Special Military District (SMD) and the Kiev SMD that called for the covert concentration of their offensive formations within the border area by September 11th. On that day, the General Staff formed two fronts[2] for carrying out the planned operations—one within each of the two districts. The Belorussian Front comprised the 3rd, 4th, 10th, and 11th Armies, the 23rd Independent Infantry Corps, and a mechanized cavalry group. The Ukrainian Front included the 5th, 6th, and 12th Armies.[3]

By September 16th, 1939, the Wehrmacht, which had attacked Poland on September 1st, reached the line Lvov–Vladimir-Volynsky–Brest-Litovsk–Białystok. Obviously because of the Wehrmacht's unexpectedly rapid advance, the Red Army began its own attack without awaiting the complete concentration of all its troops, especially those of the Belorussian SMD. The Soviet attack, which involved advance detachments and mobile tank and cavalry units, began on September 17th, 1939, at 5:40 a.m.

[2] The "fronts" were the Red Army's largest operational troop formations, above armies, corps, and divisions. They compare to the Wehrmacht's army groups [TN]. [3] Matvey Vasilyevich Zakharov, *Generalny shtab v predvoennye gody* (Moscow: AST, 2005), 293.

Table 1.2. Forces, tanks and fighter planes deployed in the German–Polish–Russian war by all three belligerents.

	Germany	Poland	Soviet Union
Divisions	62	39	approx. 73.5 [a]
Armored units	7 divisions	none	1 corps, 10 brigades
Tanks	2800	870 (with small tanks)	no information
Fighter planes	2000	407	no information

[a] The available figures on the number of Red Army divisions are incomplete; the true number may therefore have been even higher.

The Red Army's operational plan called for a determined attack on a broad front, followed by a deep penetration and fragmentation of the Polish defense and the annihilation of the separated parts. The aim was to wipe out, in a single lightning strike, the remnants of the Polish troops that were facing the Russians. Within 12 days, the troops of the Red Army, progressing at an average speed of 21–29 km per day, advanced by 250 to 350 km overall until they reached the line Białystok–Brest-Litovsk–Lvov–Stryi.

The total number of forces and assets deployed by all sides in the German–Polish–Russian war is shown in table 1.2. The sheer number of the Soviet troops concentrated near the Polish border with Poland indicates that their task was not just to "protect the brotherly Belorussian and Ukrainian people," but also to crush the remnants of Poland's armed forces and to occupy Poland's eastern territories that had previously belonged to Belarus and Ukraine. Given the Red Army's strength relative to that of the Wehrmacht, it seems possible that even a confrontation with the Wehrmacht had not been ruled out. This idea is by no means absurd: a publication released in 2006 by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation stated that "some Soviet commanders entertained the idea of joining forces with the Poles in order to fight against the Germans."[4]

Since the Wehrmacht had already reached the above-mentioned line on September 16th, 1939, Germany could consider itself victorious; only remnants of the Polish army remained to be subdued. Against this background, the enormous size of the forces deployed by the Red Army on September 17th strongly suggests that Stalin was ready for a confrontation with the Wehrmacht, should this prove necessary in order to stop its further advance.

The new western border of the USSR was fixed in the treaty of September 28th, 1939, between the USSR and Germany. This border ran close to the Curzon Line, which had been recognized previously by England, France, the USA, and Poland.

[4] Valeriy Viktorovich Abaturov, et al., eds. *Na zemle Belarusi. Kanun i nachalo voiny: boevye deistviya sovetskikh voisk v nachalnom periode Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny.* (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2006), 37.